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On 13 January four pro-Soviet hardliners, including ex-President 'Abd al-Fattah Ismail who returned in early 1985 from a five-year exile in Moscow, launched an attempt to assassinate or overthrow Yemeni Socialist Party Secretary General and President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Council Ali Nasir Muhammad al-Hasani. Hasani was wounded in the attempt and may be dead. Shortly after the attempt, the four--Ismail, Deputy Premier Ali Antar, Minister of Local Government Ali Salim al-Baydh, and Party Higher Control Committee Chairman Ali Shayi Hadi, were arrested and executed, according to an official Aden radio statement. The Governor of Abyan Province, Muhammad Ali Ahmad, a staunch supporter of President Hasani, apparently has assumed leadership of the pro-government forces. Since the attempt on Hasani's life there has been intensive fighting between the government forces and backers of the coup plotters.

Hasani was a leftist but his moderation of Aden's radical foreign policy seems to have been the motive for the move against him. He had normalized relations with Oman, North Yemen and Saudi Arabia and had been broadening ties to West European states. Under Hasani South Yemen had established or upgraded diplomatic ties with all NATO member countries but the United States.

South Yemen is entirely dependent on the Soviet Union for military assistance. Since the early 1970s, progressively more radical regimes seized power in South Yemen until, under President Ismail, Aden concluded a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union.

Under President Hasani, South Yemen's relations with the USSR have occasionally been troubled. Most of Aden's foreign trade shifted to West European states and Japan, and loans and grants--apart from military equipment--from the Soviet Union and East European countries levelled off or declined. Hasani visited the Soviet Union several times between 1980 and 1985 and was sometimes received coolly. Thoughtful Arabists consider it to possibly have been a Soviet-sponsored coup.

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Attached paper prepared by DDI for passage to Marvin Stone, Deputy Director, USIA. Picked up at Hqs. by Mary Smith of Mr. Stone's office.

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